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ABSTRACT

Career research has generally focused on either career stages of individuals or organizational models but not on an integration of both. Mental health administrators in Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin were interviewed and completed questionnaires about turnover rates in their profession. Career types were identified and compared across job characteristics, reactions to the job, commitment to the job and withdrawal behaviors. Results indicated that there was general homogeneity across all domains. However, differences were found indicating that those with direct service experience and advanced degrees engaged in more general management activities. Withdrawal behaviors indicated that multiple direct service positions individuals were more affected by role ambiguity, conflict and overload. Those who did not begin work in mental health were more affected by role conflict and ambiguity. Implications suggest career types within mental health may have relevance for determining possible fit between positions and past work and educational history. (Author/KMF)

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CAREER LADDERS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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CAREER LADDERS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Interest in career research is reflected in the recent creation of career interest groups within the Academy of Management and American Psychological Association as well as recent publications (Driver, 1980; Hall & Hall, 1980). Most of the modern career theories focus upon career stages of individuals, particularly professionals (Bartolome' & Evans, 1979; Dalton, Thompson & Price, 1977; Schein, 1978).

An individual differences approach to career paths has been taken by Driver (1980). He identified four career types: (a) linear, single upward movement, (b) steady state, single career with little upward movement, (c) transitory, frequent changes in career and (d) spiral, few changes in career with upward movement in each career. While Driver's theory is interesting, it does not provide organizations with an understanding of its members' movement within the organization. Vardi (1980) has argued for the integration of individual career models with organizational models so that both individuals and organizations can be served.

From the organizational perspective, "career" typically describes a series of job experiences which provide a person with improved skills and abilities (Digman, 1978). Organizations assume that placing people in different jobs, perhaps with increases in responsibility, will make them better able to assume jobs in upper levels of management. If this assumption is correct, then different career paths should lead to the acquisition of different skills and abilities, and individuals in similar positions with different work histories should report engaging in different types of job activities, requiring different types of skills and having different perceptions of work. In addition it may be expected that the next job they would like to hold will be affected by their past career

history. Different career paths may result in different levels of identification with the occupation, organization, job and withdrawal behaviors (intention to leave and turnover).

The data reported here focus on the most common career paths of mental health administrators. Comparisons between occupants of these careers will be made on the variables presented in Table 1. These variables include both self reported role responsibilities (e.g. training needs, problems on the job), psychological climate variables (e.g. role conflict, role ambiguity), withdrawal behaviors (e.g. intention to leave), commitment (e.g. commitment to organization), organizational characteristics (e.g. size of budget, staff), and factors considered when taking another job (e.g. family, community).

METHOD

SUBJECTS:

Mental health administrators in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin were requested to participate in a study of turnover rates of such administrators. All community level mental health systems in Wisconsin and Minnesota were contacted while from Michigan, a 40% stratified random sample based on population of the catchment area was selected. Of the 110 systems contacted, 109 allowed participation of at least some administrators. One director did not allow anyone to be included. In a second system the director allowed staff to be interviewed but not himself. In a third system the director was interviewed, but he did not allow staff to participate. From these 109 systems, 314 directors and administrators reporting to these directors were interviewed. A questionnaire was left with each person interviewed; of these 314, 287 were returned for a response rate of 92%.

A questionnaire was left for administrators' spouses; of these 230, 192 were returned for a 74% response rate.

INSTRUMENTS:

Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed. The interview included questions concerning work activities, skills needed, past work history both within and out of present organization, perceived training needs for self and subordinates, frequency of experienced stress and its precipitators, controlling board characteristics, perceived problems on the job, past living history, marital status, number and ages of children. (See Table 1 for a summary.)

The administrator's questionnaire contained five major types of questions. These included: (a) biographical information, (b) community satisfaction, (c) importance of work and nonwork components in decision to leave both community and job (d) organizational climate and (e) personality.

The spouse's questionnaire contained items similar to the administrator's questionnaire. These included: (a) community satisfaction, (b) importance of work and nonwork in the decision to leave both job and community, (c) spouse's past living history, (d) community characteristics and (e) spouse's participation in the decision to leave present community.

PROCEDURE:

Each administrator was interviewed separately in his/her office by one of three interviewers. The interview required from one to four hours to complete after which questionnaires were left for the spouse and administrator to complete and return. Each questionnaire contained a three digit number to allow the matching of interview, questionnaire and spouse data and to maintain confidentiality. Because an 18 month follow-up was to be conducted, the data were identified by job title, system code, and

mother's maiden name.

One month after the interview, administrators who had not returned a questionnaire were contacted by telephone. A second telephone call was made two months after the interview. Three months after the interview the administrator was called for the final time.

The interview data were coded using specific categories for each of the questions. Questionnaire data were compressed into composite scores via factor analysis or internal consistency analysis.

Feedback of information was conducted by sending four reports to each system. These reports included: (a) statistical presentation of administrators' data, (b) narrative presentation of administrators' results, (c) spouses' statistical data, and (d) spouses' narrative of results. All spouses requesting information received the spouses' statistical and narrative reports.

RESULTS

Career types were identified by choosing: (a) educational level, (b) nonmental health work experience, and (c) number of direct service positions held prior to administration. These six career types included (a) administrators (with bachelors degrees or less) whose career began in mental health (MHB), (b) administrators (with advanced degrees) whose career began in mental health but they held no direct service positions prior to administrative positions (MHA0), (c) administrators (with advanced degrees) who held one direct service position prior to an administrative position (MHA1), (d) administrators (with advanced degrees) whose careers began in mental health and who held two or more direct service positions prior to an administrative position (MHA2), (e) administrators (with bacheors degrees) whose career did not begin in mental health (NMHB), and (f)

administrators (with advanced degrees) whose career did not begin in mental health (NMHA). Direct service was not identified for persons without advanced degrees because of relatively small sample sizes. The first four career types represent individuals with a singular career path as a mental health professional while the latter two types represent individuals with multiple careers with at least one full time nonmental health job. Table 2 presents the six career paths identified. As the table displays, most administrators held advanced degrees and began their careers in mental health. Yet 37% of the sample had not begun their working career within the mental health field.

Comparisons were made between the six career types on academic discipline (Psychology, Social Work and others). Results of the analysis presented in Table 3 show that career types were not equally represented across academic disciplines. As might be expected those not having a degree in Psychology or Social Work were more likely to hold positions out of mental health. Those within the "other" category were less likely to have an advanced degree. A comparison between career types on types of positions held (director of system, director of agency in system, coordinator of a service) indicated career types were equally represented in the three kinds of positions.

Multiple discriminant analyses were performed on the self reported activities; skills needed to be effective, training needs and problems faced on the job. Only the analysis on activities performed on the job produced a significant discriminant function ($\chi^2(50)=69.32$, $p < .05$). Table 4 presents the standardized discriminant function weights, correlation of variables with the overall function, univariate means and group centroids for the one significant function for activities on the job. As the table displays, three variables had standardized weights greater than .40 and four had correlations greater than .40. The function is defined by boundary spanning activities of Public Relations, Meetings, and General Administration on one end and specific Program Coordi-

nation on the other. This represents a general to specific continuum in that those engaged in activities on the boundary spanning end of the continuum have greater diversity of activities and appear to include more general management activities while the program end of the continuum is specific to a single program. As the univariate means and group centroids show, singular career occupants who held at least two direct service positions and who hold advanced degrees do the more general activities while less educated (singular and nonsingular careers) do specific program management. This might lead one to believe that the former group held positions with greater responsibility and importance. Yet discriminant analyses on objective characteristics of each position (e.g. size of budget, number of employees, contracting) and characteristics of each system (e.g. size of budget, employees, number of programs provided) did not distinguish between career types. Nonetheless different career types do appear in positions with different activities.

Discriminant analyses on role characteristics, perceived role and job satisfaction produced no significant functions. Frequency of stress and symptoms of stress were also compared across career types with no differences found. Although career types may not differ on frequency and symptoms of stress, it is possible there are differences in situations which precipitate stress. A multiple discriminant analysis on the stress situations identified in Table 1 indicated no significant functions yet one univariate F was significant. This significant finding indicated that "personal style" was more of a cause of stress for (a) those with advanced degrees and no direct service background and (b) those with advanced degrees whose career did not begin in mental health.

A multiple discriminant analysis on commitment to the job, job importance and commitment to the organization was performed. Again there

was not a significant discriminant function yet univariate analyses indicated significant differences between career types with those beginning careers out of mental health perceiving their jobs as less important.

Another set of discriminant analyses were performed on aspects of withdrawal behaviors including what administrators considered when taking past job and what they would consider in the future. Again the analyses indicated no significant differences.

To determine if the specific combination of the three history variables employed was masking effects of individual variables, correlations were calculated between the individual history variables and the variables included in the discriminant analyses presented above. This analysis indicated few significant relationships between other variables and education level and number of direct service jobs. Table 5 presents the significant relationships which include: (a) the more education administrators had, the less they weighed nonwork components in the decision to take another job, and the more they weighed work when taking last job, (b) the more direct service positions administrators had held, the older they were, the less family played a role in administrators' decision to leave, and the more likely they said they would leave in the next year.

The results for first job (mental health or not) indicated more significant findings. Table 6 presents these results. As expected those not beginning in mental health had participated in more organizations than those in mental health. Those beginning in mental health had more education than those out of mental health. The most interesting of the findings indicated that nonwork related variables were more important to those who began work in nonmental health settings.

An analysis of position characteristics indicated that both education level and singular career in mental health were related to having a larger

staff, (both administrators and direct service) and larger number of people reporting directly to them. Due to the significant correlation between singular career in mental health and education level, this relationship was partialed out of the correlations between education and position characteristics and also partialed out of the relationships between singular career and position characteristics. The result of this analysis was the elimination of all but one significant relationship between education and position characteristics (number of staff reporting directly to administrators) while all of the significant relationships remained for singular career. This indicates that a single career in mental health does result in some differences in position characteristics.

Although few significant differences were found between career types on levels of specific job related variables, it is possible that differences in relationships between these variables may exist within career types. To ascertain if such relationships did exist, three outcome variables were analyzed: (a) job satisfaction, (b) intention to leave the organization and (c) actually leaving the organization. Role variables of ambiguity, conflict, overload, job importance and job commitment along with organizational commitment were employed to predict the three outcome variables. Two multiple regressions were performed for each outcome variable for each career type and total sample. The first regression included all the predictors with significant beta weights ($p < .05$) using a stepwize forward inclusion analysis.

Table 7 presents results of the first set of regressions. Within the table the standardized beta weights are displayed with the sample sizes and multiple correlations for each career type and overall sample. As displayed in the table, magnitude of prediction decreased from job satisfaction to intention to actual turnover. Despite the relatively low multiple correlation for turnover, it is important to note that an 18 month lag existed between the measurement of role variables and determination of the turnover sample.

Table 8 presents results of regression analyses with the most parsimonious combination of predictor variables. Only statistically significant standardized beta weights are presented. Organizational commitment was the variable which appeared consistently across outcomes and career types. Job importance and commitment were significant for satisfaction and intention but not for actual turnover. In contrast, role conflict was not significant for satisfaction and intention but it was for actual turnover. Role ambiguity was related to dissatisfaction while role overload was related to intention. In general the results indicated significant prediction of outcome variables with the relationships generally in the expected direction (e.g. job satisfaction positively related to job importance and commitment and negatively related to ambiguity and conflict.)

Differences between career types appeared throughout the analyses. Job satisfaction and intention were significantly predicted for all career types while turnover could not be predicted for MHB types. Specific variables related to satisfaction differed across career types with differences appearing between singular and multiple career types. Role ambiguity was most important for NMHA while job importance was critical for NMHB.

The results for intention to leave were less clear. Job importance was related for four of the types but not for MHAO and NMHB types. Type NMHA indicated suppressor variables were present in that job commitment was positively related rather than negatively related to intention to leave.

Specific variables related to turnover indicated that commitment to the organization was the best predictor for MHAl, MHAO and NMHB. No variable predicted turnover for NMB while role conflict predicted it for NMHA. Admninistrators with advanced degrees and no direct service experience had two variables related to turnover, job importance and job satisfaction. In contrast to analyses comparing career types on levels of variables

differences between career types on prediction of outcome variables did appear.

Due to the large number of analyses, a summary of significant findings is presented below.

. Those with advanced degrees and several direct service positions were more likely to engage in general management, boundary spanning activities than those with other career paths.

. Those with more education when seeking another job weighed nonwork less than those with less education.

. Those having held more direct service positions were more likely to say they were going to leave the job within the next year.

. Those having a singular career in mental health tended to be better educated, weighed nonwork less in a decision to take another job, and had larger staffs working for them than those with multiple career paths.

. Ignoring career path, job satisfaction was predicted by commitment to organization, commitment to the job, job importance, and role ambiguity.

. Ignoring career path, intention to leave was predicted by commitment to the organization, commitment to the job, job importance and role overload.

. Ignoring career path, turnover was predicted by commitment to the organization and role conflict.

. The job satisfaction of those having held jobs outside the mental health field was more affected by role ambiguity and job importance.

. The job satisfaction of those with multiple direct service jobs was affected by role conflict and overload.

. For those who began their career in mental health administration, role ambiguity affected job satisfaction.

. For those with multiple direct service jobs in mental health, role conflict predicted intention to leave.

. For those with multiple direct service jobs, turnover was influenced by job importance and job satisfaction.

. Those who began their career in nonmental health settings were more affected by role conflict both in intention to leave and actual leaving.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that career types, as defined herein, do not result in differences in reactions to the job (role conflict), commitment to the job or organization nor differences in skill needed for the job, and problems faced on the job. Stress experienced on the job, a concept closely alligned to burnout (Perlman & Hartman, in press), did not discriminate between career types, and thus there appears to be no past history which one can point to as the cause of burnout.

There were some differences in terms of activities performed on the job. Those having advanced degrees and several direct service positions engage in more boundary spanning activities and less program coordination than those with less education (first career in mental health or not) or those with advanced degrees with only one direct service position. These career types may be following a career path which allowed them to experience a broader range of mental health activities.

Results of analyses comparing specific components of the career definition indicated the most significant variable to be having a singular career in mental health. Whether a person began in mental health or not resulted in different position characteristics, with those having a singular career having greater personnel responsibilities. Also those with multiple careers were more concerned about nonwork variables when considering new positions.

These results may indicate that multiple career individuals do not have as strong a professional role orientation as singular career people.

The concept of career types within mental health may have relevance for determining possible fit between positions and past work and educational history. Someone without an advanced degree is more likely to be involved in specific programs while those with advanced degrees and multiple direct service positions have broader responsibilities.

Prediction of job outcomes (satisfaction, intention to leave and turnover) indicated that those with multiple careers and advanced degrees were more likely to be dissatisfied and to leave as a result of conflict and ambiguity. More attention must be paid to these professionals with respect to role definition. These individuals appear to have a greater reaction to these aspects of the job than do other career types (singular career, bachelors degree or less). Those individuals who have held several direct service jobs with advanced degrees respond more to conflict and overload and are more likely to leave the organization because of lack of job importance. Specific attention to developing meaningful work for these individuals is important in retaining them. This may be a result of their extensive experience coupled with greater education. It would be interesting to determine if they actually leave administration and return to direct service in another organization.

Due to the lack of consistency in labeling positions across mental health organizations, it was extremely difficult to compare or assign individuals to specific types of careers. This lack of consistent definition led to the more "gross" categorization herein. A more consistent use of titles related to position responsibilities would be of benefit in the attempt to define career types and should result in a better understanding of careers in mental health.

Overall the concept of different career types is supported not by actual differences between these types in terms of self reported reactions to the work environment. Rather it is supported by differential relationships between these job variables and critical outcome variables such as satisfaction and turnover.

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TABLE 1

Variables Used in Primary Data Analyses

Job Activities

- Public Relations
- Meetings
- Program Coordination
- Personnel Administrators
- Budget Monitoring
- Program Development
- Planning
- Budget Development
- Contracting
- General Administration

Skills Needed to be Effective

- Communication
- Personality
- Interpersonal
- Knowledge of Disability
- Systems
- Budgeting
- Political
- Problem Solving

Problems on Job

- Staff Relationships
- External Relationships
- Role Characteristics
- Budget
- Personal Style
- Service Delivery

Stress Situations

- Role Characteristics
- External Political Relationships
- Internal Conflict
- Budgets
- Personal Style
- Services

Role Characteristics

- Do Time Administration
- Budget
- Agencies Contracted
- Staff Size
- Direct Service
- Administrative
- Span of Control

Perceived Role

- Role Ambiguity
- Challenge and Variety on Job
- Role Overload
- Role Conflict
- Job Commitment
- Job Importance
- Job Autonomy

Work Satisfaction

- Intrinsic
- Extrinsic
- Overall

Commitment

- Organization
- Occupation
- Job

Withdrawal

- Intention to Stay
- Turnover
- Opportunities for another job

Considerations for Next Job

- Intrinsic Work
- Co-workers
- Extrinsic Work
- Family
- Community Facilities
- Leisure
- Residents' Values
- Community Location

System Characteristics

- Budget
- Employees
- Administrators
- Contracting

Table 2

Definition of Career Types and Distribution

First Job	Degree	Direct Service Positions	Number	Percentage	Label
Mental Health	BA/BS, or less	--	28	9.6%	MHB
Mental Health	Advanced	1	49	16.8%	MHA1
Mental Health	Advanced	2 or more	71	24.3%	MHA2
Mental Health	Advanced	0	37	12.7%	MHAO
Non Mental Health	BA/BS or less	--	38	13.0%	NMH
Non Mental Health	Advanced	--	69	23.6%	NMHA

Table 3

Career Paths by Discipline

	Psychology	Social Work	Other
MHB	2% (1)	5% (5)	16% (18)
MHA1	27% (15)	19% (20)	11% (13)
MHA2	34% (19)	36% (38)	11% (13)
MHA0	21% (12)	14% (15)	9% (10)
NMHB	5% (3)	6% (6)	18% (21)
NMHA	11% (6)	20% (21)	35% (40)

$x^2 = 57.06$ d.f. = 10

Table 4

Significant Discriminant Function
for Job Activities

Activity	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	Standardized Weights	Correlation with Functions
Public Relations	.76	.79	1.97	.60	.40
Meetings - inhouse	.67	.64	1.74	.61	.44
Program Coordination	.47	.59	2.68*	-.31	-.51
Personnel Administration	.46	.62	.78	.13	-.01
Budget Monitoring	.48	.50	.60	.27	.18
Program Development	.46	.65	1.27	.21	.02
Planning	.45	.50	.53	.24	.19
Budget Development	.44	.50	1.64	-.07	-.16
Contracting	.21	.41	.43	.23	.03
General Administration	.15	.35	1.85	.55	.41

Career	Public Relations	$\bar{X}$ Meetings	Coordination	Administration	Centroid
MHB	.71	.54	.57	.14	-.34
MHA1	.76	.53	.59	.10	-.21
MHA2	.82	.82	.32	.25	.47
MHA0	.76	.65	.38	.08	-.15
NMHB	.42	.61	.63	.11	-.53
NMHA	.90	.74	.43	.13	.17

Table 5

Significant Correlation of
Education and Direct Service Positions

Education	
Importance of community services for taking a new job	-.11
Importance of community values for taking a new job	-.15
Number Direct Service Positions	
Intention to leave	.11
Importance of intrinsic work factors for taking a new job	-.10
Importance of family for taking a new job	-.12
Age	.12

Table 6

Significant Correlations of
Singular versus Multiple Careers

Careers (1 = Mental Health, 2 = Non Mental Health)	
Total number organizations worked in	.19
Highest Degree	-.24
Importance of community services for taking a new job	.13
Importance of leisure activities for taking a new job	.14
Importance of climate for taking a new job	.10
Importance of community values for taking a new job	.15

Table 7
Direct Solution

Job Satisfaction

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Org. Commitment	26**	61*	22**	39**	23*	42	10
Ambiguity	-18**	-05	-08	02	-33*	08	-46**
Job Importance	15*	-40	28	13	15	50*	10
Job Commitment	11*	09	19	05	16	10	11
Conflict	-12	-30	-20	-20*	-12	17	00
Overload	00	-09	07	-35**	06	00	08
R=	63**	58*	70**	80**	76**	66	61**
N	276	28	47	67	33	37	63

Intention to Leave

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Job Importance	-28**	-55*	-29**	-43**	-16	-32	-23*
Org. Commitment	-23**	-21	-15	-23	-12	-24*	-28*
Overload	10*	00	35**	-10	10	13	13
Job Commitment	11*	10	-15	18	24	12	27*
Conflict	09	-06	08	27*	-15	-17	17*
Job Satisfaction	-05	-11	-05	06	-45**	02	00
Ambiguity	-01	-15	-25	02	21	05	14
R=	58**	65*	59*	67**	69*	53	73**

Turnover

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Org. Commitment	-25**	-26	-45	-05	00	-59**	-23*
Conflict	11*	-19	10	14	-12	17	32*
Overload	07	42	-04	-11	36*	-02	-02
Job Commitment	08	00	-04	-06	23	-16	20
Job Importance	-08	00	-07	-25**	19	16	-22
Ambiguity	07	-10	00	06	37	13	-22
Job Satisfaction	02	12	04	-28**	-10	12	-08
R=	46**	43	55*	62**	59	57	52*

* p<.05
** p<.01

Table 8
Parsimonious Solution

Job Satisfaction

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Ambiguity	-24**				-36*		-58**
Conflict				-20			
Overload				-36**			
Org. Commitment	29**	48**	62**	48**	42*		
Job Importance	16*					59**	
Job Commitment	10*						
R	62**	48**	62**	79**	73**	59**	58**

Intention to Leave

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Ambiguity							
Conflict				28*			27*
Overload	13*		39**				
Org. Commitment	-28**					-45**	-29*
Job Importance	-30**	-61**	-32*	-45**			-31*
Job Commitment	10*						28*
Job Satisfaction					-59**		
R	57**	-61**	55**	63**	59**	45**	72**

Turnover

	Overall	MHB	MHAI	MHA2	MHAO	NMHB	NMHA
Ambiguity							
Conflict	20**						42**
Overload							
Org. Commitment	-30**		-54**		-44*	-51**	
Job Importance				-33**			
Job. Commitment							
Job Satisfaction				-35**			
R	44**		54**	-59**	44*	51**	42**

* p<.05
** p<.01